United Nations A/C.3/53/SR.18

General Assembly
Fifty-third session

Official Records

Distr.: General
25 March 1999
English
Original: Spanish

Third Committee

Summary record of the 18th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 20 October 1998, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Hachani ..... (Tunisia)
later: Mr. Ball (Vice-Chairman) ..... (New Zealand)

Contents

Agenda item 106: Promotion and protection of the rights of children

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

98-81747 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.07 p.m.

Agenda item 106: Promotion and protection of the rights of children (A/53/41, A/53/57, A/53/72–S/1998/156, A/53/95–S/1998/311, A/53/281, A/53/311 and A/53/482)

1. **Mr. Otunnu** (Under-Secretary-General, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict) said that, since his appointment, he had carried out four main types of activities. First, he had engaged in advocacy efforts on the need to protect children, targeting both the general public and Governments, non-governmental organizations, the media and other organizations of civil society, with a view to encouraging their active participation. Second, he had promoted the implementation of existing national and international provisions, since legal instruments were useless unless they were translated into practical actions. Third, he had launched specific initiatives on the ground to create protected areas for children in conflict zones; those initiatives included, *inter alia*, demining operations and the provision of humanitarian aid to meet the needs of such children. Fourth, he had addressed post-conflict activities. In that connection, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank and other bilateral and multilateral assistance agencies should, from the outset, include in their rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes measures to meet the needs of children.

2. He attached great importance to country visits, which had a threefold objective: to gain first-hand knowledge of the situation of children in armed conflicts, to draw attention to the plight of such children and, to the extent possible, to propose initiatives. In June 1998 he had presented an informal report to the Security Council, which was the United Nations organ responsible for the maintenance of peace and security. Following his presentation, a public debate had taken place, on the basis of which the Security Council had adopted a statement by the President. That statement was an important instrument for promoting the protection of children affected by armed conflict.

3. He had participated actively in the process which had led to the adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court. He was pleased that the Statute contained provisions on abuses committed against children, particularly their use in armed conflicts and the need to prevent military attacks on hospitals and schools. It was important to make use of that instrument even before the Court began to function, since the Statute represented a very important innovation in international law.

4. It was also essential to mobilize non-governmental organizations throughout the world. To that end, he had met with the heads of organizations working in that area, whose responses had been very positive. Non-governmental organizations elaborated programmes at the national and international levels and formed coalitions to address one or more aspects of the agenda for the protection of children affected by armed conflict.

5. At the regional level, he had tried to promote initiatives to raise awareness of the issue of children affected by armed conflict, to encourage greater attention to that problem and to mobilize the necessary political support. In June 1998, a high-level symposium on the issue had been held in London. In November, a meeting would be held in Tokyo for the Asia-Pacific region, and the following year a meeting would be held in Africa at the initiative of the Organization of African Unity. Moreover, he had established numerous contacts with the media with a view to giving more publicity to problems related to the issue of children and armed conflicts. Those contacts had already begun to bear fruit.

6. United Nations agencies should be the first to apply the principles relating to the protection of children. To that end, he had met with the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations to discuss various issues related to the conduct of peacekeeping personnel. A joint working group would be mandated to consider the applicable provisions in that area and to prepare training programmes on the subject.

7. The report he had prepared for the General Assembly (A/53/482) contained 12 recommendations which, he trusted, would be analysed by delegations in the context of a fruitful dialogue. In his view, the most important problem was how to ensure the practical implementation of international provisions and local values on the ground. That meant, above all, that Governments should incorporate the issue of children and armed conflicts into their foreign policies and should undertake to exert pressure on warring parties that systematically mistreated children and women. They were in a position to do so, since they were the ones that provided the latter with financial support and weapons. Those who committed such atrocities must be made to pay their political cost. Another important recommendation referred to the statement by the President of the Security Council, which he had mentioned earlier, and to the need to strengthen the Council's commitment to ensuring the protection of children in armed conflicts.

8. As mentioned earlier, non-governmental organizations played a vital role, since the agenda for the protection of children affected by armed conflict could not remain exclusively the responsibility of the intergovernmental system and of Governments. Such organizations made contributions in many areas, such as by building a movement of advocacy at both the national and international levels and, in the case of organizations working in the field, by actively defending children during and after conflicts. They also served as an important source of independent and objective information. Lastly, they played an important role in following up initiatives on the ground in various countries.

9. Monitoring was a political issue for both Governments and non-governmental organizations. It was important that Governments should let it be known that they closely followed developments in conflict situations and that they were actively engaged in ensuring that the warring parties honoured their commitments. In that connection, a number of proposals on the establishment of monitoring mechanisms were under consideration. Second, it was important to understand that, in addition to international instruments, the value systems of individual societies represented another basic means of protecting children in armed conflicts, since one of the main objectives of any society had always been the protection of children, who were its most vulnerable members. In some cases, those value systems had deteriorated almost to the point of disappearing. It was necessary to support communities that tried to restore such values in order to ensure complementarity between local efforts and the implementation of international instruments and programmes.

10. With respect to post-conflict activities, the international community should apply the lessons learned and disseminate knowledge of best practices that had already proved to be effective. The aim was to protect children as effectively as possible.

11. It was necessary to raise the minimum age established in the Convention on the Rights of the Child for the recruitment and participation of children in armed conflicts. The legal limit of 15 years was too low and should be raised to 18 years. He supported initiatives to amend the relevant provision.

12. It was also important to conclude agreements at the regional level to prohibit not only the recruitment, kidnapping and use of children in armed conflicts, but also the transfer of small arms and the laying of landmines. Those were transboundary problems that must be addressed through agreements between the countries in the affected areas. In an interdependent world, no warring party, whether a Government or an insurgency group, acted in isolation. All sides needed the support of the outside world to obtain funds and weapons and to legitimize their actions. For that very reason, the international community and individual States could take advantage of that dependency to exert pressure with a view to preventing women and children from being further victimized by armed conflicts.

13. **Ms. Calcetas-Santos** (Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography) said that the report she had submitted to the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice at its seventh session, held in Vienna, had called for the adoption of initiatives to address the practical difficulties encountered by child victims in the justice system. She welcomed the news that a draft manual for victims in general had been prepared. However, she regretted that, while protective measures for children in conflict with the law, such as the Beijing Rules, the Riyadh Guidelines and the Tokyo Rules, had long been in place, no international provisions had been adopted to prevent the various forms of multiple victimization of children who appeared before courts of justice as victims.

14. From 21 to 25 September 1998, at the invitation of the Government, she had conducted a field visit to the Lao People's Democratic Republic to study, in particular, the issue of trafficking in children; the report on that mission would be submitted to the Commission at its next session. The following month, she would conduct her second mission, which would consist of a visit to Belgium.

15. She had attended the Conference on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the Baltic Sea Region, held in Tallinn, Estonia, on 3 and 4 September 1998. From 30 September to 2 October, she had participated in the Second National Conference on Children, Young People and Domestic Violence, held in Brisbane, Australia, at which she had delivered the keynote address. In that connection, she took the opportunity to request countries for information on domestic violence. She had also participated in a symposium held in the framework of the Asia-Europe Meeting, which had taken place in London from 6 to 8 October 1998, and had given the expert's address on the prevention of commercial sexual exploitation. On that occasion, she had recommended the exchange of information on models that had been implemented successfully in various countries.

16. Her previous reports had focused mainly on the commercial sexual exploitation of children through prostitution or pornography because that area had been in urgent need of attention. The current report, in contrast, focused on the sale and trafficking of children for any purpose, including commercial sexual exploitation.

17. The sale and trafficking of children was a difficult issue, primarily because information on the subject was scarce. That might be attributable to a lack of understanding of the concepts of sale and trafficking. As yet, there was no international definition of sale; consequently, it was hard to distinguish between sale and trafficking, or even to determine whether such a distinction existed. For that reason, her report dealt with sale and trafficking without treating them as distinct or separate categories.

18. The concept of sale was basically a commercial or mercantile one that dealt only with real, personal or intangible property and in which the consideration was usually the price in money. The traditional concept of sale had clear parameters that differentiated it from other commercial transactions such as barter or leasing. Those parameters were often blurred in the case of sale of children. Those issues must be resolved if international attention was to be drawn to that violation of the rights of children. It must be determined whether a sale took place only when the transaction was made for money or whether the concept could include exchanges for goods or for special favours.

19. It was also necessary to define the nature of the transfer of custody of the child from one person to another as a result of the sale. According to her proposed definition, the transfer must have some degree of permanence of either the physical custody of the child or parental authority over the child. That point was crucially important for dealing with cases such as prostitution or pornography, since the characteristics of the sale of children to brothel owners would differ from those of pimping, which could be likened more closely to lease of service, as the transfer of the child was strictly temporary.

20. In certain cases, the term trafficking was used as synonymous with sale, while in others it implicitly carried with it the added requirements of the transportation of the subject of trafficking within a country or across borders. Previously, it had applied mostly to drug cases, but it had recently been expanded to include commercial sexual exploitation, specifically of women and girl children. One additional complication was that it was closely linked to migration.

21. There were strong indications that the greatest percentage of sale or trafficking of children was for commercial sexual exploitation or adoption. Adoption should be examined in greater depth since most Governments were reluctant to strictly enforce laws regulating it because they believed that adopted children would have a better family situation. Other purposes for the sale or trafficking of children were labour, criminal activities, war, sports and begging.

22. The traditional patterns of trafficking in children had been changed by the global economic recession, the instability of countries in transition, the stricter enforcement of stiffer penalties for the exploitation of children, the dislocation caused by disasters, both natural and man-made, more innovative modes of recruitment and transportation and the more sophisticated equipment used by traffickers. Moreover, in certain parts of the world, trafficking prevention strategies that were successful in other countries might be ineffectual because of geographical differences. For example, no matter how tight the border controls were between Laos and Thailand, it would be impossible to prevent the trafficking of children because it was very easy to cross the Mekong river.

23. It seemed that the sale of children had become a more profitable business than drug trafficking; it now ranked second only to the arms business. If that was indeed true, children all over the world were threatened and appropriate measures needed to be adopted to protect them. To that end, the United Nations should mainstream the question of children into all its programmes.

24. **Mr. Ndiaye** (Director, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that respect for the rights of the child had become one of the priorities in the United Nations system-wide action on human rights. Due to the quasi-universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child children were no longer "invisible" but had become a priority item on the international agenda. While the primary responsibility for achieving the goals of the Convention rested with States, worldwide solidarity was required in order to ensure the effective protection and promotion of the rights of the child. In that regard, it was encouraging that most United Nations agencies and bodies had incorporated the spirit and standards of the Convention into their mandates. He hoped that the United Nations Development Assistance Framework would ensure the implementation of the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and of the Special Rapporteurs.

25. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights was making efforts to integrate the question of the rights of the child into its overall policies, activities and programmes, and to support existing efforts to prevent and combat the trafficking of women and children. Since the high number of reports on the implementation of the Convention submitted by States to the Committee on the Rights of the Child had generated a very heavy workload for that Committee, the Office of the High

Commissioner had formulated a plan of action to provide substantive support to the work of the Committee and to assist in transforming recommendations into reality through the provision of adequate resources, coordination with partners within the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations, and follow-up. The General Assembly had adopted by consensus the amendment to the Convention, increasing from 10 to 18 the membership of the Committee, with a view to enabling it to carry out its mandate more efficiently. To date, 63 out of the 120 States needed for the entry into force of the amendment had accepted it.

26. During the period covered by its biennial report (A/53/41), the Committee on the Rights of the Child had held its twelfth to seventeenth sessions. Since then, it had held two other sessions in the course of which it had considered reports submitted by 44 States parties to the Convention, and had held a general discussion on children and HIV/AIDS. The Office of the High Commissioner hoped that the appropriate attention would be paid to that item.

27. **Mr. Sucharipa** (Austria), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that the European Union would incorporate into its programmes the protection of children in conflict situations, as recommended by the Special Representative. Noting that the Special Representative had visited various countries, he said that the Union wondered what steps could be taken to ensure follow-up to the recommendations of the Special Representative and what measures States could take to establish a framework for cooperation on that issue within the United Nations system. The European Union, which attached great importance to the question of the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, also wondered whether the United Nations could participate in the debate on the impact of new technologies, including the Internet, on such activities.

28. **Mr. Fulci** (Italy) noted that children's rights were increasingly being violated, despite the fact that the Convention on the Rights of the Child had been ratified by 191 of the 193 States that had signed it. The Committee on the Rights of the Child, responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Convention, was increasingly emphasizing the need to protect children in conflict situations. In that regard, his country had adopted an act on measures to combat prostitution, pornography, sex tourism and child pornography, inspired by the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in Stockholm in 1996. That act covered the principle of extraterritoriality and carried very heavy penalties.

29. He welcomed the debate and statement by the President of the Security Council on the question of children and armed conflict. In that regard, the Special Representative should indicate how the Security Council could keep that issue under permanent review. The Special Representative could ensure that his visits to areas affected by conflict received even wider publicity by using the mass media to promote his cause. In addition, special awards could be instituted for activities relating to the protection of children affected by armed conflict. His delegation wished to know what role the Economic and Social Council could play in the forthcoming year with respect to the question of children in armed conflict and in post-conflict situations.

30. **Ms. Zoumanigui** (Guinea) asked for more information on the results of the appeal made by the Special Representative for implementing a pilot project for the rehabilitation of Sierra Leonean children.

31. **Mr. Kamitani** (Japan) said that the Special Representative should give his views on the working relationships among the various bodies of the United Nations system with respect to the question of children in armed conflict and on what steps could be taken to promote such relationships. His country, which would organize a symposium sponsored jointly by the office of the Special Representative, would like to secure the cooperation of such bodies.

32. **Ms. Albuquerque** (Portugal) wondered how cooperation between the operational activities of the Special Representative and those of United Nations bodies such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees could be promoted. She also wished to know the criteria used by the Special Representative in selecting the countries he visited.

33. **Ms. Kaba Camara** (Côte d'Ivoire) asked whether steps had been taken to improve the lot of children held as common prisoners or prisoners of war, if the issue of street children had been addressed and if personnel of peacekeeping missions were aware of the measures they should take to protect the rights of children.

34. **Ms. King** (United States of America) expressed the hope that her Government would ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child before there was a change of Administration. She agreed that the minimum age for recruitment must be raised, though not necessarily to 18, and expressed concern at the fact that the existing minimum age of 15 years was not yet being observed. It was doubtful that the minimum age could be raised when the existing norms were not being applied. She enquired whether there was

cooperation between the initiative to take preventive measures and the humanitarian working group.

35. **Mr. Otunnu** (Assistant Secretary-General, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict), in reply to the questions posed by the delegation of Austria, said that follow-up activities were proceeding on two levels. On the political level, delegations must strengthen the commitments made in the field by utilizing their own channels of communication with various sectors to demonstrate their interest in ensuring that the parties to the conflict fulfilled those commitments. Non-governmental organizations could also help because they had their own connections. On the administrative level, the Office of the Special Representative maintained ties with non-governmental organizations and United Nations field staff; that collaboration was vital, but it was adversely affected by the shortage of human resources. Although it might seem hard to believe, it took one year to engage a P-3 staff member for one year out of a three-year mandate fully financed by voluntary contributions. The system must be rationalized, and he hoped that delegations could be of help. Cooperation between the Office of the Special Representative and the operational agencies took place on various levels. When he visited a country, the United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations working in the field drew up the programme, selected the themes, provided him with information and later carried out the follow-up to his negotiations. An informal group at Headquarters provided advisory services and helped to formulate strategy, but once again, the shortage of staff had prevented that system from functioning properly. He himself was a member of the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs and on Peace and Security and the United Nations Development Group, and he hoped that issues concerning children would take on fundamental importance in the work of those Committees.

36. With regard to the questions of the delegation of Italy, he hoped that that issue would become important not only in the Security Council and the General Assembly, but also in the Economic and Social Council; the establishment of the "humanitarian segment" of the Council seemed to suggest that it might. He hoped that Mr. Fulci, in his capacity as Vice-President of the Council, would help in achieving that goal. Further progress was needed concerning the relationship with the Security Council; everyone must strive to ensure that the Council got used to taking into account the need to protect children when it took decisions. He further clarified that the Special Representative did not have — and was not supposed to have — a presence in the field. Preparations in the field were the responsibility of United Nations personnel and humanitarian organizations, while his function was to open doors politically and, in certain situations, to break the deadlock. He thanked the representative of Italy for his innovative suggestion regarding the establishment of a special award; he hoped to be able to consult with experts on the matter in the future. One of the issues to which he attached the greatest importance was the promotion of the Office of the Special Representative. It was essential to highlight the importance of field visits, and the communications media could make an important contribution to that effort. Finally, he thanked Mr. Fulci for the connections he had been able to make with the Committee on the Rights of the Child, especially in the case of children in countries affected by conflict.

37. In reply to the question from the delegation of Guinea concerning Sierra Leone, he said that that had been the first time where, after an extensive visit, he had appealed to the international community not to wait for events to unfold, but to make Sierra Leone a pilot case of concerted action to resolve the problems of women and children, to recognize the crucial role of ECOMOG in Sierra Leone and to provide it with logistical and financial support. In subsequent discussions with Governments, the European Union and within the context of the international conference which he had organized in New York at which the Secretary-General had presided, those ideas had been well received and they were being put into practice. The main thing now was to translate those commitments into activities in the field, and for that purpose, both bilateral and collective consultations would be held with delegations. In fact, he had recently discussed that issue in Brussels with the relevant commissioners.

38. He thanked the delegation of Japan for its support and for organizing the forthcoming regional symposium for Asia and the Pacific, to be held in Tokyo in November. As for the relationship between his Office and the operational agencies, he was determined to improve the capacity of his Office, and would report on the results of his efforts to the delegation of Japan.

39. Responding to a question from the delegation of Portugal on operational linkages, he said that since the Special Representative had no presence in the field it was important to establish a sound working relationship with operational agencies. That was why there was an advisory group; it also explained the importance of the Executive Committees, and the increased participation of the Special Representative in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. With respect to the criteria used in selecting the countries he visited, there were no set rules and suggestions were accepted; of course, certain events called for a visit to a

particular country at a particular time. Usually he travelled to countries where there was or had been an armed conflict. He would like to know if there were any important cases requiring his attention, so that he could visit them as soon as possible.

40. In reply to the question of the delegation of Côte d'Ivoire regarding children in detention or accused of committing atrocities and specific crimes in times of war, he said that the best example was Rwanda, where an attempt was being made to provide the maximum possible protection to children during the trials, and to ensure the fact that they were minors and should not receive the same treatment as adults was always kept in mind. He would raise the issue when he visited that country. The problem of street children was an important one following an armed conflict. In many countries, such as Liberia or Sierra Leone for example, the expression "crisis of the young" had been coined to indicate that there were children who had been uprooted and separated from their families and who were living on the street, in camps for displaced persons or in institutions. That group of children received a great deal of attention from his Office.

41. As far as peacekeeping operations were concerned, he stressed that United Nations agencies and officials should set an example through their conduct, without falling into complacency, and suggested that standards of conduct should become part of the daily routine in United Nations activities. He had held consultations with the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations so that everything necessary would be done to improve the conduct of staff. Governments should also provide better training for their troops and apply stricter standards of behaviour, and non-governmental organizations must take a more critical view of the conduct of their staff in the field.

42. With regard to the question posed by the delegation of the United States, he wished to make it very clear that there were two aspects to the issue of the minimum age for recruitment and that they were inseparable: the current standard was too low and must be raised, but that should not prevent it from being applied. That was neither a legal nor an ideological issue, but a practical one: children must be provided with the greatest possible protection; the higher the minimum age, the greater the protection.

43. **Ms. Calcetas-Santos** (Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography) expressed concern at the fact that few delegations had asked questions and said that she hoped that that was not due to a loss of interest since the Stockholm Conference. Only two years had passed since that event, and children remained in danger. The international community should bear child-related issues in mind in order to prevent children from being harmed by its decisions. In reply to the comments made by the Austrian delegation, she said that virtually nothing had been done in the area of the Internet, primarily because Governments made no attempt to understand it. The international community should take advantage of the Internet, and use it to disseminate legislation on children, registers of paedophiles and lists of missing children and to exchange information about strategies that had proved successful and should prevent it from being used for harmful purposes such as child pornography, mail-order bride services and sexual slavery. Cooperation with Internet service providers would be necessary in order to avoid conflict with the media or violation of freedom of the press. In investigating pornography, statistics were important as a means of increasing public awareness; however, they varied according to who had compiled them. The main thing was not to forget that the problem existed.

44. **Mr. Ndiaye** (Director of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights), replying to a question from the representative of Côte d'Ivoire on peacekeeping forces, said that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights was committed to training its forces in human rights-related issues. It was also cooperating with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in preparation for the signing of a memorandum of understanding on the adoption of a common approach since members of peacekeeping forces must not ignore such matters or help to worsen the situation of children.

45. He planned to attend a meeting at Glen Cove which would deal with the question of peacekeeping operations and, in particular, cooperation with the regional organizations and the question of human rights, including implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

46. **Ms. Bellamy** (Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that the Committee's discussion of the rights of the child at the current session was particularly timely, coming as it did during the fiftieth anniversary year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Like the other human rights instruments, the Declaration had energized a process that was transforming the world. A special illustration in that regard was the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which had been ratified by 191 countries. No other treaty of its kind had ever amassed such a level of support in so short a time. The results could be seen in the unprecedented gains for children that had occurred in the nearly 10 years since the adoption of the Convention by the General Assembly.

Because of the Convention, children were higher on the public and political agenda than ever before and there was widespread recognition of their fundamental right to develop physically, mentally and socially to their fullest potential and to participate in decisions affecting their future. In many countries and in every region of the world, the importance of the rights of the child had been reflected in concrete changes in law, policy and practice.

47. The Committee on the Rights of the Child played a vital role in promoting and supporting that trend by reviewing and assessing progress in States parties' implementation of the rights of the child and by offering guidance and support to those who worked on behalf of children's rights. However, factors such as the large number of ratifications of the treaty and the requirement that States parties should submit reports every five years had left the Committee with an enormous volume of work. Urgent action must be taken since there was a real danger that the Committee might soon find itself completely overwhelmed. She therefore urged States parties to accept the proposed amendment to article 43, paragraph 2, of the Convention so that the membership of the Committee could be increased from 10 to 18 as soon as possible.

48. At the same time, UNICEF would continue to work ever more closely with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and to endeavour to ensure implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and fulfilment of the commitments made at United Nations summits and conferences in order to guarantee girls' right to equality, development, protection and participation in society.

49. In over 50 countries, UNICEF had responded to recommendations made by the Committee on the Rights of the Child regarding the need for technical cooperation in areas such as capacity-building in monitoring, reporting, data collection and coordination on the rights of the child; legal reform, with special emphasis on juvenile justice; the right to health and education; protection from violence, exploitation and abuse; gender discrimination and promotion of gender equality; and promotion of the right to participation.

50. UNICEF had a special responsibility to help to mobilize members of the United Nations system in programmes of technical assistance; that task had been greatly facilitated by the United Nations reform process. UNICEF was also promoting enhancement of the human rights dimension in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) with regard to both the implementation of that Framework and the revision of its provisional guidelines.

51. As Co-Chairman of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) Working Group on the Right to Development, UNICEF had fostered awareness of Governments' legal commitments to children and consideration of the observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Those commitments must be honoured since, despite extraordinary progress, enormous challenges remained. Reviewing the situation of children throughout the world she provided alarming statistics on, *inter alia*, children living in extreme poverty, child mortality, malnutrition, trafficking in children, problems related to HIV/AIDS and the abuse of children in armed conflict. As UNICEF had informed the Security Council in September, it was precisely because of their special vulnerability that children must always be a priority concern in action to promote peace, implement peace agreements and resolve conflicts.

52. With respect to children in armed conflict, she said that the excessive availability and proliferation of small arms had made it easier to exploit children as soldiers. For that reason, UNICEF had urged that all disarmament and demobilization programmes should address the special needs of children in the areas of education, vocational training and psychological and social support. That was also why UNICEF remained unshakably committed to working to ensure that the minimum age at which children could be recruited for military service was raised to 18.

53. UNICEF greatly welcomed the establishment of the International Criminal Court, which would help bring to justice those who committed serious crimes against children. It also applauded the rapid ratification of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, a triumph which would allow that treaty to enter into force in early 1999. However, the ultimate effectiveness of the Convention would require its ratification by many more countries and the prompt implementation of its demining provisions.

54. It was important to recall the report of the Secretary-General on progress in the implementation of the World Declaration and Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children, which stressed the importance of the Summit outcome as a strategy for implementing human rights and called for a renewed political and financial commitment to the Summit goals. The next step in that process would be the review of progress achieved at the national level by the year 2000. It was an effort that must be supported by regional

forums in order to promote the implementation of the goals, and the role of Governments was vital in that connection.

55. UNICEF activities to enhance the mainstreaming of human rights in all activities had been the driving force behind the preparation and recent adoption by the UNICEF Executive Board of a medium-term plan for the years 1998–2001, which was clearly anchored in human rights values and standards and designed to promote and ensure universal respect for the rights of the child and other human rights, particularly those of women.

56. The special session of the General Assembly to be held in the year 2001 and all the events related to it would offer a unique opportunity to mobilize the broadest possible movement for children, to launch an agenda for children in the twenty-first century and to establish updated goals for children in the first decades of the new millennium. That cause required strong and assertive leadership, particularly on the part of Governments, and the renewed commitment and support of civil society and non-governmental organizations. It also required, more than ever, initiatives by children themselves, as well as their families, community leaders, women's organizations and the private sector.

57. **Mr. Martino** (Observer for the Holy See) drew attention to the situation of children in armed conflicts, which changed the "springtime of life", as the Holy See regarded childhood, into a deadly winter. In some 50 countries around the world, children were suffering from the impact of armed conflict. He cited figures for children killed, orphaned, injured or permanently disabled, made homeless and suffering from serious psychological traumas. At the threshold of a new millennium, those numbers were distressing and indicated the extent of the abomination of which society was capable. The Holy See condemned all forms of exploitation of children, particularly in armed conflict, and called on the family of nations to ensure that children did not suffer from difficult circumstances.

58. According to paragraph 25 of the Plan of Action for Implementing the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990s, children needed special protection in situations of armed conflict. Preventive action to avoid conflicts was the most effective remedy. However, in cases where children were already victims of armed conflicts, immediate, concrete and concerted action must be taken. Children in post-conflict situations must also be taken into account, and they must be given the necessary care and treatment in order to ensure that today's victims did not become tomorrow's oppressors.

59. With regard to landmines, he stressed the importance of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, ratified by the Holy See on 17 February 1998, which could become a landmark in preventing the death or maiming of thousands of innocent children. With the entry into force and universal acceptance of that Convention, the problem could be eradicated from the face of the earth.

60. The international community could not abandon over 50 million children who were victims of armed conflict. It was time to act on the solemn declarations made by the international community. Tomorrow's international peace and security depended on the children of today; thus, now was the time to tell those who committed the abomination of sending children into combat that they were committing a serious crime against the fundamental rights of the child and that the international community could not and would not tolerate such crimes. The establishment of constructive projects for rehabilitating child victims of war should become an immediate priority of the relevant international agencies.

61. The family of nations could rely on the continued commitment of the Catholic Church to create a better future for children. In his message to the Secretary-General on the occasion of the World Summit for Children, Pope John Paul II had expressed the appreciation of the Catholic Church for all that had been done under the auspices of the United Nations and its specialized agencies to guarantee the survival, health, protection and integral development of children.

62. *Mr. Ball (New Zealand), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

63. **Mr. Sucharipa** (Austria), speaking on behalf of the European Union and the associated countries Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, stressed the great importance which the European Union attached to the protection of the most vulnerable group in society, children, who were being prevented from enjoying their basic human rights in many ways. The European Union firmly believed that a global coalition must be forged to fight against the abuse of children, particularly sexual exploitation, the use of child soldiers and child labour. The European Union was also gravely concerned that children in all parts of the world were victims of violence, including domestic violence, which could take various forms, both physical and mental.

64. The Convention on the Rights of the Child constituted the universal basis for the protection of children; however, much remained to be done in order to achieve universal

application of the standards it set. On the eve of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention, many difficulties still needed to be overcome and, unfortunately, not all States had ratified it. The European Union strongly urged those States which had not yet done so to accede to the Convention without delay. Furthermore, many of those which had ratified the Convention had done so with substantive reservations, some of them contrary to the object and purpose of the Convention. The European Union would continue to object to reservations that were contrary to the object and purpose of the Convention; such reservations undermined the Convention and seriously called into question the commitment of the States concerned. The European Union requested States to formulate their reservations as precisely and narrowly as possible. It also strongly supported requests by the Secretary-General, the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Committee on the Rights of the Child that States parties should review their reservations on a regular basis with a view to their progressive withdrawal.

65. National legislation often failed to implement fully the provisions of the Convention and other international human rights and humanitarian instruments of particular relevance to the rights of the child. The European Union urged States to provide the necessary legal framework and take the appropriate administrative measures to protect children's rights and to commit the necessary human and financial resources to the realization of those rights.

66. The Committee on the Rights of the Child had shown tremendous commitment in its consideration of the national reports required by the Convention and in respect of other very vital activities, such as the holding of a series of meetings with United Nations bodies and specialized agencies, and with non-governmental organizations. The importance of its task fully justified the adoption of measures to increase the resources and the support provided to it.

67. With respect to the mainstreaming of children's rights, the European Union particularly welcomed the leading role played by UNICEF, which had adopted a rights-based approach to its work, in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. To that end, it had issued guidelines on rights-based programming and was conducting staff training activities in that new area. The European Union strongly urged other bodies of the United Nations system to take similar measures to protect and promote the rights of the child.

68. The European Union was committed to eliminating traditional gender stereotypes that negatively affected women and to strengthening the self-reliance of the girl child, as well as her voice and role in society. Therefore, it recognized the need to remove the cultural, legal and other obstacles that hindered the girl child's full and equal enjoyment of her human rights. It also deplored any laws and legal or other practices that promoted or condoned discrimination against the girl child. The European Union was concerned about the persistence of gender discrimination, which often arose from cultural preferences for boys. In many cases, girls still did not have equal access to education and health-care services that took their special needs into consideration, and were still victims of harmful traditional and customary practices. The European Union stressed the need to prohibit female genital mutilation, and supported the practical steps taken by Governments, intergovernmental bodies, non-governmental organizations, community organizations and religious institutions to eliminate such practices through, *inter alia*, efforts to change societal attitudes by raising awareness of the harmful effects of such practices. With regard to physical and psychological violence against the girl child, it was important to introduce and enforce sanctions against the perpetrators of such acts. Further attention should be paid to the situation of girl children in armed conflicts. The European Union strongly believed that the gender sensitization of military personnel should be an integral part of conflict management.

69. The toll of warfare on children was unacceptable. It was estimated that, in the last decade alone, 2 million children had been killed, 4 to 5 million had been permanently disabled, 12 million had been rendered homeless, more than 1 million had been orphaned or separated from their parents and more than 10 million had been psychologically traumatized. The European Union was fully convinced that children must play no part in warfare, as either recruits or civilians. Concerted political and diplomatic pressure must be placed on those who continuously violated the rights of children, and the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to mobilize official and public opinion for action should be fully supported. The European Union called upon the States concerned and other parties to follow up the recommendations of the Special Representative, and agreed with the latter that the needs of children in post-conflict situations must be addressed. The European Union called upon the Special Representative to use his role as an advocate for children in conflicts to speak out clearly with regard to specific conflict situations in which the rights of children were violated or were in danger of being violated. The European Union noted with great satisfaction that the Security Council had discussed that

issue on 29 June 1998 and had issued a presidential statement on children and armed conflict.

70. The European Union welcomed the successful outcome of the United Nations Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Establishment of an International Criminal Court, held in Rome. The Statute of the Court contained provisions which, *inter alia*, prohibited the use of children as soldiers and excluded the Court's jurisdiction over persons under the age of 18. It was important to emphasize that the Statute qualified the use of child soldiers as a war crime. With respect to the minimum age established for the recruitment and participation of children in hostilities, which was also referred to in the Statute of the Court, the European Union considered that standard, set by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and by international humanitarian law, provided a basis from which higher levels of protection must evolve. The European Union therefore looked forward to the early and successful conclusion of the draft optional protocol on involvement of children in armed conflicts, and supported the consultations being conducted to that end by the Chairperson of the working group established to prepare the draft. The European Union wished to highlight the optional character of the proposed protocol, and urged Governments that were not currently in a position to accede to the protocol not to hinder its elaboration.

71. The European Union was committed to the total elimination of landmines, and was pleased that 40 States had ratified the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, so that the Convention could enter into force on 1 March 1999. The European Union continued to support demining programmes in many countries.

72. Among the factors that led to a steady increase in the use of children as soldiers were technological developments and the proliferation of weapons, particularly light arms such as the latest types of semi-automatic rifles, which were light enough to be carried by children even under the age of 10. The European Union welcomed the Mali initiative and other efforts to curb the spread of small arms.

73. The European Union strongly believed that the sexual exploitation of children was one of the most despicable means by which the rights of children were violated and that the only way to combat the problem effectively was through vigorous national action and effective international cooperation. In particular, it was necessary to combat child prostitution, sex tourism and child pornography, including its dissemination through the Internet.

74. The World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children had led to the adoption of a Declaration and Agenda for Action aimed at the establishment of a global partnership to combat that scourge. In follow-up to the World Congress, a European regional conference had been held on 28 and 29 April 1998 in Strasbourg under the auspices of the Council of Europe. The objectives of that conference had included the identification of the problems encountered by Governments in implementing the recommendations of the World Congress. At an interregional meeting attended by 25 European Union and Asian countries, as well as the European Commission, the participants had launched a joint initiative on child welfare that included measures to combat the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

75. According to a recent International Labour Organization (ILO) study, the current economic hardships in South-East Asia had led to the expansion of the sex industry. Child sex tourism continued to be of great concern to the European Union. It was necessary to increase international cooperation between the offenders' countries of origin and countries of destination. Several countries had strengthened their legislation to allow for the prosecution of persons who engaged in child sex tourism abroad. The States members of the European Union had undertaken a number of specific activities, such as the distribution of in-flight videos and folders to deter potential sex tourists. Moreover, the European Commission would organize a symposium on the issue in the context of the forthcoming twenty-third Brussels Travel Fair, to be held from 24 to 26 November 1998. The child welfare initiative launched at the Asia-Europe Meeting provided for the exchange of information on best practices in that area. The European Union appealed to all States that were potentially countries of origin or countries of destination of offenders to take immediate action against child sex tourism.

76. The European Union agreed with the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography that the media must be sensitized on the issue of children's rights. The European Union condemned the spread of child pornography and, in particular, its dissemination on the Internet. The production, dissemination and possession of child pornography in all its forms must be prohibited. The European Union trusted that States would incorporate the necessary provisions into their national laws and that international cooperation in that area would be enhanced. It urged the working group on a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography to make significant progress, at its next session, towards the

early conclusion of its work, preferably before the tenth anniversary of the Convention. Action against that type of child abuse could not be effective without the cooperation of States, the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations and private enterprise, including on-line services and Internet service providers.

77. Child labour was another form of exploitation to which children throughout the world were subjected. According to recent ILO studies, at least 250 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 were obliged to work, often in conditions that were harmful to their physical and mental health. Child labour was both a consequence and a cause of poverty, and slowed down economic and social development. In view of the urgency of adopting and implementing new legislation against the exploitation of child labour, the European Union welcomed the discussions held at the eighty-sixth session of the International Labour Conference with a view to the adoption, in 1999, of a convention against the most extreme forms of child labour. Since access to primary education was one of the most effective tools for reintegrating and rehabilitating child workers, the European Union welcomed the appointment, by the Commission on Human Rights, of a special rapporteur on the right to education.

78. The European Union wished to highlight the serious impact of human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) on children. It deplored the fact that, owing to child prostitution and sexual abuse, a growing number of children were infected with HIV. Consequently, it welcomed the thematic discussion on children and HIV/AIDS organized by the Committee on the Rights of the Child at its most recent session.

79. States' reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child confirmed the fact that children with disabilities tended to go unnoticed in society. The European Union had welcomed the thematic discussion held by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 1997 on the rights of children with disabilities, as well as the recommendations formulated on that occasion. Children with disabilities had the same rights as other children and should be included in all activities in society, particularly in the educational system. Both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities called for action to promote the principle of equal opportunity for children with disabilities.

80. The European Union firmly believed that it was necessary to promote human rights education, since education played a vital role in the development of all children, and should include the recognition of their rights as young citizens. The European Union urged all States to accept fully their responsibilities in that area and in all areas related to the protection of children.

81. **Ms. Morgan-Moss** (Panama), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, pointed out that the Convention on the Rights of the Child was one of the most widely accepted international instruments, since, only eight years after entering into force, it already had 191 States parties. She urged those States which had not yet done so to ratify or accede to the Convention as a matter of priority. Such action must be taken without delay in order to achieve the objective of universal acceptance established at the World Summit for Children and reiterated in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. Owing to its nearly universal acceptance, that instrument constituted the necessary legal basis for all United Nations activities to promote and protect the rights of the child. That was all the more important because, in planning its activities, particularly those related to development, the United Nations increasingly gave priority to the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

82. The countries of the Rio Group appreciated the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which deserved greater support and recognition. States should continue to strive to take into account and implement the Committee's comments and recommendations concerning periodic reports. The Committee must be provided with more resources and facilities for the effective performance of its functions, in accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 1998/76. In that resolution, the Commission also called upon States parties to accept the amendment to paragraph 2 of article 43 of the Convention, which would increase the membership of the Committee from 10 to 18 experts upon its entry into force. The Rio Group appealed to those States which had not yet done so to consider accepting the amendment as a matter of urgency.

83. The Rio Group took note, with satisfaction, of the Plan of Action of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to strengthen the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and appreciated the support which UNICEF provided to States parties at all stages of the implementation and reporting processes. It should be borne in mind that the current situation of millions of children in many parts of the world remained critical as a result of poor economic and social conditions, poverty, armed conflicts, the exploitation of child labour and the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and that the number of children infected with HIV/AIDS had risen at an alarming rate.

84. The Rio Group welcomed the discussion held during the sixteenth session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on children with disabilities, as well as the commitment to the elaboration of a plan of action to ensure the inclusion of such children in society. At the same time, it supported the work of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, as well as that of the working group of the Commission on Human Rights on a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

85. The Rio Group reiterated its concern about the need for a prompt and lasting solution to alleviate the suffering of children caught in wars and armed conflicts. Adequate protection must be provided to refugee and internally displaced children. In that connection, the countries of the Rio Group reiterated their strong and decisive support for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the great importance they attached to the invitations he had received to visit countries in which there were situations of armed conflict. They also supported the efforts of the working group of the Commission on Human Rights on a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on involvement of children in armed conflicts.

86. The Rio Group wished to highlight, in particular, the importance of the initiative taken in 1998 by the President of the Security Council and the Secretary-General to hold a public debate in the Security Council on the involvement of children in armed conflicts, which had represented an innovative means of publicizing the painful situation of such children. It was important that Governments, in cooperation with international and non-governmental organizations, should take the necessary steps to eliminate discriminatory customs and practices harmful to girls, in line with the recommendations of the Fourth World Conference on Women. The Rio Group reaffirmed its continued commitment to making every effort to promote and protect the rights of all children.

87. **Mr. Andjaba** (Namibia), speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), said that the countries members of the Community had taken note of the report entitled "Progress on the implementation of the World Declaration and Plan of Action from the World Summit for Children" (A/53/186). While they welcomed the considerable progress made in areas such as the nearly universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the eradication of guinea worm disease, increased coverage of oral rehydration therapy, reduction of polio cases and promotion of breastfeeding, they regretted that such progress varied greatly across countries and regions, and were especially concerned about the slow progress in reducing malnutrition and maternal mortality, improving sanitation and increasing girls' education.

88. SADC would work with Governments, the United Nations and non-governmental organizations in preparing for the special session of the General Assembly to review the achievement of the goals and targets agreed upon at the World Summit for Children and to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Experience had shown that those goals could be met if countries displayed sufficient political will, if all stakeholders were able to participate and if adequate resources and support were provided. The international community should strive to promote the objectives of the World Summit for Children in sub-Saharan Africa.

89. SADC encouraged United Nations entities to follow the example of UNICEF by taking the rights-based approach into account in formulating country programmes, since protection of the rights of children and women was essential to human progress. It commended UNICEF for its continued support of the Committee on the Rights of the Child at all stages of the implementation and reporting processes, and welcomed the decision to address the issue of education in the 1999 edition of *The State of the World's Children*. It took note of the deliberations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child concerning children with disabilities, as well as the collaboration and exchanges among various United Nations bodies to promote the rights of children.

90. Since Africa continued to suffer from a heavy external debt burden that contributed to the increase in poverty and affected the political and social sectors, SADC reiterated its call for urgent, effective, equitable, development-oriented and durable solutions to the problems of external debt and debt servicing in the developing countries.

91. Women and girls accounted for 50 to 55 per cent of the populations of countries in southern Africa. Although some progress had been made in improving their political, economic and social situation, the benefits achieved were modest, especially in comparison to their large numbers and their enormous contributions to society. Education for women was particularly important, since, in addition to promoting their advancement, it had the direct effect of improving the health of their children. The health status of women and children in some SADC countries was a serious problem owing to the deterioration of health-care services, malnutrition and the impact of structural adjustment programmes. The following year, the Commission on the Status of Women would discuss the issue of health and, he

hoped, would focus on the problems of girl children. SADC called on Governments and national and international governmental organizations to implement fully the conclusions adopted in 1998 by the Commission, especially the one on the girl child, which highlighted the need to end the widespread discrimination against girls. SADC hoped that the relevant draft resolution would be adopted once again by consensus and that the number of co-sponsors would increase.

92. The AIDS epidemic was resulting in a rapid increase in the number of orphans and child-headed households, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, where the percentage of orphans had tripled or quadrupled in some countries. It was estimated that, by the year 2010, at least 42 million children, most of them living in sub-Saharan Africa, would have lost one or both parents. At the SADC Summit of Heads of State held in September 1998 in Grand Baie, Mauritius, it had been noted that AIDS was not only a health issue, but also a development issue. The participants had also discussed the preventive measures taken at the regional level, especially in the health and employment sectors, and had urged member States to continue to make concerted efforts to combat the epidemic through the elaboration of an intersectoral plan of action for the region. At their September 1998 meeting, the SADC Council of Ministers had adopted a policy document for the health sector and a biennial plan for 1999–2000, which had identified five priority areas: HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases; communicable diseases, particularly malaria and tuberculosis; standardization of health information systems; mobilization of human and financial resources; and reproductive health. The Council had also approved a proposal to conduct a study on strengthening tuberculosis control. The participants in the Summit had signed an addendum to the 1997 SADC Declaration on Gender and Development, indicating that the SADC Governments would adopt specific measures in the areas of legislation, public education, training and awareness-raising and service provision. With a view to improving the nutritional status of children, the Council had approved terms of reference for the agricultural sector, as recommended by the Ministers of the food, agriculture and natural resources sector.

93. SADC was aware that armed conflict was part of the reality of its member States, and would give due consideration to the recommendations put forward in the report of the Special Representative. SADC called on the Secretary-General to ensure that the office of the Special Representative was provided with the human resources needed to carry out its mandate. In 1998, for the first time, the Security Council had addressed the issue of children affected by armed conflicts, and SADC commended the Special Representative for his efforts in that regard. SADC agreed that the minimum age of recruitment and participation in military activities should be raised to 18, fully supported the draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and hoped that the new mandate of the Chairperson of the working group of the Commission on Human Rights would break the current stalemate. Lastly, SADC applauded the adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court, which would be an important mechanism for the protection of children.

94. **Mr. Chowdhury** (Bangladesh) said that, despite the efforts of UNICEF, Governments, organizations, civil society and the media, limited progress had been made in the protection of the rights of children. At the approach of the General Assembly's special session in 2001, it had become clear that strong political commitment, widespread participation of stakeholders and the provision of adequate resources were necessary. All United Nations bodies, especially UNICEF, should cooperate to achieve the objectives of the World Summit for Children. Special emphasis should be placed on protecting the rights of poor or disabled children and children in situations of armed conflict, who were the most vulnerable groups. Poverty represented the worst violation of human rights, since it deprived children of their childhood, and the worst example of that phenomenon was child labour, which was an evil practice that must be abolished.

95. The Governments of South Asia had chosen the year 2000 as the deadline for ending child labour in hazardous or bonded conditions and 2010 for the eradication of all child labour. Bangladesh had abolished child labour in the garment industry, which was its largest export sector. However, the number of poor children continued to rise, indicating the need for national action and international cooperation at all levels, as well as the allocation of substantial resources, since children's rights were closely linked to the right to development. Children must be protected from violence, which was endemic in some areas, and child victims of violence must be reintegrated into society.

96. Trafficking in children was an extremely serious problem. National awareness campaigns and training for enforcement authorities could help to prevent it. Regional and international efforts must also be made to dismantle trafficking networks and extend support to the victims. An important step in that direction had been the endorsement, by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), of a regional convention to combat trafficking in women and children. Immediate steps must be taken to stop

the sexual exploitation of children; in particular, every effort must be made to complete the draft optional protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

97. Another priority area concerned the rights of children in armed conflicts, who faced numerous dangers: landmines, abduction, recruitment, displacement and sexual exploitation. The plight of such children had been highlighted by the Special Representative, who needed the support of all countries in order to pursue his work. Assistance efforts should begin during hostilities and should continue during the post-conflict peace-building process. Since girl children were particularly vulnerable, there was an urgent need to defend their rights, particularly by offsetting, through legal measures where necessary, the effects of discriminatory perceptions and practices and by providing equal opportunities in the areas of education, health and nutrition. Bangladesh had the honour to initiate the proposal to declare the period from 2001 to 2010 the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World, and hoped that all States would support that decision during the current session.

98. **Ms. Cyanzayire** (Rwanda) said that Rwanda would spare no effort to cooperate with the international community in seeking solutions to the various problems that affected thousands of children throughout the world. The promotion and protection of the rights of children were very important to Rwanda for a number of reasons, in view of the many problems which the country had faced since the 1994 genocide, which had particularly affected children by leaving thousands of orphans unprotected and often obliged to live alone and take on the responsibilities of heading a family. Many others had been traumatized by the atrocities they had witnessed and experienced.

99. The number of street children had risen considerably, giving rise to uncontrolled juvenile delinquency. Moreover, it must be recalled that a considerable number of children had taken part in the genocide at the instigation of adults. Added to that were the nutritional problems and diseases that had been a direct consequence of the particularly difficult economic situation of a country still pursuing the reconstruction process.

100. Despite its many difficulties, her country was determined to protect children and promote their rights. To that end, her Government had adopted a series of measures to alleviate the problems she had already enumerated and to contribute to the harmonious development of children. All parts of the country had shelters for children who had no families or who had been separated from their parents, which were supported by the Ministry of Social Affairs; the medium- and long-term objective was to find foster families in which such children could lead a more balanced social life. Those children received free education, thanks to the fund set up by the Government to help victims of the genocide and the massacres.

101. Traumatized children were cared for in centres that provided specialized care and expert advice to enable them to rebuild a normal life. In addition, steps had been taken to provide homes for street children in social service centres, where they could continue their education and learn simple trades. With respect to children in conflict with the law, particularly those who had participated in the genocide, children under the age of 14, who could not be held criminally responsible before the law, were sent to rehabilitation centres, where they received training and preparation to facilitate their psychological readjustment and reintegration into society.

102. In the area of health, the Ministry of Health was conducting prevention and immunization campaigns to combat endemic diseases that affected children. In that regard, Rwanda was grateful for the support of the international community and of organizations that dealt specifically with the problems of children. It also appreciated the efforts of civil society, which had lent invaluable support to the Government's activities. Many associations had focused their efforts on the establishment of orphanages.

103. With respect to Rwanda's fulfilment of its international commitments in the area of promoting and protecting the rights of the child, she was pleased to report that most of the principles laid down in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified in 1990, had been explicitly incorporated into domestic law.

104. The right to education was reaffirmed in Rwanda's Constitution, which provided that primary education should be free and compulsory, subject to the parents' obligation to participate in the education of their children. The law on national education reflected the provisions of article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by stipulating that education should be directed to the moral, intellectual and physical development of children and should provide them with the basic knowledge they needed to live in society and to have an impact on the country's socio-economic situation.

105. The sexual exploitation of children was prohibited and severely punished under the Criminal Code, as were the abduction and torture of minors. The law provided that youth should be considered an extenuating circumstance in the case of children between the ages of 14 and 18 who were accused

of offences, and that criminal responsibility could not be attributed to children under the age of 14.

106. **Ms. Nishitateno** (Japan) said that her country had put great effort into international cooperation to enhance the welfare of children. Despite Japan's difficult economic situation and budget constraints, it continued to make voluntary contributions to UNICEF, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Health Organization (WHO) and other international organizations that provided relief to children in need. It had also promoted bilateral aid, especially in the fields of education, health and medical services. Recently, the international community had paid more attention to the protection of children affected by armed conflicts. International organizations such as UNICEF, UNHCR, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), as well as relevant non-governmental organizations, played a crucial role in providing humanitarian assistance to children and others in need. Japan therefore intended to continue to provide support to such organizations.

107. As it had announced earlier in the Security Council, Japan would host a symposium on children and armed conflict in November 1998, in cooperation with the office of the Special Representative, United Nations University and the Japan Committee for UNICEF. The Special Representative would be the keynote speaker, and senior officials of interested Governments and international organizations, as well as representatives of non-governmental organizations, would gather in Tokyo to participate in discussions on three subjects: advocacy and public awareness-building, protection of children in conflict situations and rehabilitation and reintegration of children in the context of post-conflict peace-building. Japan hoped that those debates, in which a number of related issues would also be discussed, would contribute to the effort to improve the situation of children affected by armed conflicts.

108. In view of the large number of children who, during or after armed conflicts, became victims of landmines, Japan hoped that its acceptance, on 30 September, of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction would encourage other Member States to join international efforts to achieve a universal and effective ban on landmines and strengthen cooperation in demining activities so that children would no longer be exposed to that deadly hazard. In that regard, the Phnom Penh International Forum on Demining and Victim Assistance would be held in late October, with the support of the Japanese Government, to provide information on the demining and victim assistance practices that had proved most successful in Cambodia. The participants would also discuss the protection of children from anti-personnel landmines through mine-awareness activities.

109. The sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography were other issues that urgently required the attention of the international community. Since the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in Stockholm in August 1996, the Japanese Government, in cooperation with UNICEF, had engaged in activities to raise awareness on those issues.

110. Since all those problems transcended national borders, Japan participated actively in related activities organized by the United Nations, the Asia-Europe Meeting and other bodies. It also exchanged information and cooperated in that area with the International Criminal Police Organization (ICPO), which had been conducting surveys and research on crimes related to child pornography, among other activities.

111. Japan welcomed the resolution on action to combat international trafficking in women and children, which the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice had adopted at its seventh session, and continued to support the working group on a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, as well as the draft optional protocol on involvement of children in armed conflicts.

112. **Mr. Ma Young-sam** (Republic of Korea) said that immediate attention should be paid to the needs of children, who were usually the first victims of war. In that regard, his delegation supported the presidential statement (S/PRST/1998/18) adopted by the Security Council in June 1998, as well as the work of Mr. Olara Otunnu, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. It also welcomed the Special Representative's recent field visits and the various recommendations contained in his report (A/53/482).

113. The delegation of the Republic of Korea was deeply concerned about the recruitment of children as soldiers, since that practice not only increased children's likelihood of becoming victims of armed conflicts, but also had a profound impact on their psychological development. Because they learned to kill at an early age, such children lost part of their humanity and saw killing as a guiltless act. His delegation supported the early adoption of the draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on involvement of children in armed conflicts. The United Nations working group on that issue had not yet agreed on the minimum age

for military recruitment. It was necessary to opt either to set the highest possible standards and win limited acceptance, or to improve current standards while accommodating the interests of all States parties to the Convention; in that regard, it must be borne in mind that nearly all States had ratified the Convention.

114. According to ILO statistics, about half of the world's 250 million working children between the ages of 5 and 14 were involved in an exploitative form of labour. His delegation was pleased that the International Labour Conference, which had met in Geneva in June, had made considerable progress in its discussions on the establishment of new international instruments on the prohibition and immediate elimination of the worst forms of child labour. He reaffirmed his Government's commitment to participating actively in international efforts to eradicate the exploitation of child labour. However, it must be borne in mind that poverty was the primary cause of the proliferation of child labour and that parents often preferred that their children should be mistreated rather than that they should go hungry. Therefore, it was necessary to set the immediate goal of eliminating the most extreme forms of child labour, while simultaneously working towards the long-term goal of eliminating all forms of child labour. At the same time, poverty eradication efforts must be vigorously pursued.

115. With respect to the serious problem of sexual violence and exploitation, it was not enough for countries to express their outrage at the worsening of that phenomenon; immediate action was needed. His delegation supported the recommendation contained in the report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (A/53/311) that international standards should be set. Moreover, it was important to strengthen punitive measures against not only the adults who were involved in the exploitation of children, but also the customers of that immoral business. Countries must make concerted efforts to finalize the draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography by September 1999, when the tenth anniversary of the Convention would be commemorated.

116. In the area of health, immunization campaigns were essential, since 9 million children died each year as a result of preventable infectious diseases. However, the private sector had hesitated to invest in the development of vaccines for children because they felt that that was not a profitable activity. In follow-up to the World Summit for Children, United Nations funds and programmes, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), had played a major role in establishing the International Vaccine Institute, which was based in Seoul. His delegation appealed to the international community to provide the cooperation and support needed to enable the Institute to carry out its important work. International cooperation was indispensable for enabling countries to honour the commitments made at the World Summit for Children, as well as their obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children could not understand why they were made to suffer by adults, who should be their protectors. Therefore, and because children represented the future of humanity, the international community had a duty to provide them with a secure environment.

The meeting rose at 6.20 p.m.